

# The Watering Can

*April 2013*

Newsletter of The West Carleton Garden Club and Horticultural Society  
P.O. Box 326, Carp ON K0A 1L0



## Celebrating Our Gardening Friends:

### Lis Allison

Lis Allison, who will be speaking to us about her garden in April, says that she remembers liking flowers and plants from an early age. She vividly recalls her family arriving in Northern Ontario, where she dashed out of the car and into the woods, and fell in love with a patch of Fringed Polygala. She was 10 years old at the time. During the next few years, she learned some of the basics of gardening by working in the family's large vegetable garden. At the time, she was also very interested in insects, drawing and painting the various 'bugs' that caught her attention.

Vegetable gardening was soon interrupted by a growing interest in mathematics and men, leading to her going to Queen's University in Kingston to study the one and later leaving it to marry one of the other.

Over the next several decades, Lis and her young family moved many times. While it did mean that she was never able to make a lasting garden, she did get a chance to experiment with different approaches and different situations. She renovated an old but neglected garden in Manotick, made a large rose garden in Toronto, and attempted to garden in Calgary. Most of what she knows about gardening was as a result of these efforts, plus voracious reading. She still owns, and often consults, a dog-eared set of books called the Time-Life Gardening Library.

She was an active member of the City View Horticultural Society and the Manotick Horticultural Society. As well, she was involved with one of the first feminist groups in Ottawa, being part of the team that set up the first women's shelter and later working on *Upstream*, a small feminist newspaper. She was also a member of the group that started the first co-operative art gallery in Ottawa, which still exists as SAW Gallery.

In Toronto, Lis took courses at the Ontario College of Art, most of them in the photography program. In Calgary, Lis was on the board of Centre Eye, a co-operative photography gallery. At the time, it was the one and only visual arts organization in Calgary.

Returning to Ottawa in 1985, Lis realized that her career in computers was essentially ended as the industry had

## April Meeting:

Tuesday, April 9, 2013, at 7:30 pm

Lis Allison speaks on:

### A New Garden in an Old Place: Realities of making a new garden with limited resources



Foamflower (*Tiarella collina*) and Yellow Lady Slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*) at Pine Ridge Garden.

### Please Note: Goodies by E to L:

Members whose surnames begins with letters **E to L** are requested to provide eatable goodies and door prize articles for

changed to the point that her skills were no longer needed, and her personality did not suit the new skills that were required. She decided to try to make a go of life as a potter. She had been taking Fine Art at the University of Calgary for two years, and felt that it might just be possible to make at least a second income as a potter. She gave herself five years to see if she could do it and if she would like it. So far she has been a potter for over 25 years; and, while an adequate income still eludes her, she loves being self-employed and making pots.

Back in the Ottawa area, and living in a rented townhouse while starting a new career, Lis felt the need for some point of stability in her life. She sold her Mustang and convinced her husband to buy a 12-hectare lot on the Carp Road.

Asked at the bank what the name of her new business was, she realized she had never given it a moment's

thought, and came out with, “Um, uh, Pine Ridge Studio”. After all, the new bush lot was on the Carp Ridge and had pine trees.

But building there had to wait and, for the next decade, she and her family lived in Constance Bay. Here she was able to make a more ambitious garden, designing a large herb garden, a border that included native plants such as goldenrods and asters, and a shady woodland patch. She made pots, gave pottery classes, joined the West Carleton Chamber Choir and the West Carleton Arts Society, and carefully avoided getting involved with the Fletcher Wildlife Garden. She did join the West Carleton Garden Club, but was never able to go to meetings as the choir met Tuesday nights.

Eventually the difficult neighbours in Constance Bay convinced Lis and her husband that it was time to build on their bush lot. Construction started in 1999, and in September they moved in.

Lis calls this her latest, last and hopefully best, garden, Pine Ridge Garden, and her presentation will be about the project thus far. She tells us that, in April 2000, when she opened her front door, all she saw was “a sea of yellow mud”. The after-effects of the construction of the house and studio was churned up yellow clay, piles of broken trees and branches, deep ruts left by heavy equipment (such as the well-drilling truck that got stuck and had to be pulled out by an enormous bulldozer), and stumps everywhere. Undaunted, she started near the studio and made an herb garden, then began clearing off the nearby exposed granite outcrop for a rock garden...and exploring the rest of the property. She was impressed by all the ferns. There were many species, most of which she couldn't name, and some of which she had never seen before. This led to her becoming very interested in them, particularly those native to the Ottawa Valley. It was a logical outcome of this to decide to concentrate on native plants in her garden. Besides, calling it a “Wild Garden” did somewhat excuse all the weeds....

Last year Lis was asked to help develop the William J. Cody Memorial Fern Garden at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden and this is an ongoing project.

One of Lis's goals for her gardening efforts is to share her love of native plants. To this end, she welcomes garden visitors and usually organizes at least one Fern Foray at Pine Ridge. She searches out native plants for her garden, growing many from seed and propagating others, and usually has some available for visitors.



Fern garden at Pine Ridge Garden

*Public Service Announcement*

**Electronics Drop-off Centre**

Heartwood House, 153 Chapel St.

Ottawa, ON K1N 1H5

ph. 613-241-5937

A listing of electronic devices accepted by Heartwood House is [found here](#). A \$2 donation per recycling visit is suggested.

[Heartwood House](#), a non-profit charitable organization, collects donations of computer equipment from the community and RD Long Computers (a computer recycling venture) compensates Heartwood House for its efforts. The compensation to Heartwood House is used in support of [eighteen charitable organizations](#) operating in Ottawa.

Dropped-off Centre hours are currently:

Monday / Tuesday: 8:00 am to 7:00 pm

Wednesday / Thursday: 8:00 am to 7:30 pm

Friday: 8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Note:**

In mid-May the Drop-off Centre will move to 400-412 McArthur Street. [Check here](#) for updates.

Other electronic drop-off facilities:

[Foxy Recycle](#), 2940 Baseline Rd, Ottawa. 613-726-3699

[Waste Management](#), 2301 Carp Rd, Carp, (613) 831-3563

**Reminder for the April 9 Garden Club meeting.**

Our greeter is to be Pam Leeks and speaker-thanker is to be Anita Murray.



## Things Horticultural

By Phil Reilly

### Planting in Clay Soils

In 2005, writing for our nursery website, I wrote [\*No-Loss Planting: Recommendations from a Nurseryman\*](#) to capture about a quarter century's worth of gardening experience. Standing out amongst my thoughts is that best gardening results come from matching plants to native soils rather than trying to create and maintain modified soils for particular plants.

On our property, we've had to deal with the limitations of native, heavy, clay soils. Dig a hole in it and you've got a pool in which water collects and only slowly percolates to deeper depths. Plop a purchased plant in it without first removing the friable soil mix in which the roots are growing is not wise. Further, adding rich compost to the hole prior to planting results in, during rainy weather, a water-logged hole in which a young plant can easily drown.

When running our nursery, we customarily advised customers with clay soils to dig as small a planting hole as possible to accept just the plant's root mass. Severely roughen up hole edges to discourage developing roots from just circling within the planting hole. Remove as much loose growing medium as possible from the root mass (even using a gentle hose spray to wash off more soil) then spread out the roots as you backfill the hole with the soil removed from the hole. In this way, the roots immediately become accustomed to the natural soil conditions in which they will have to live. Water in plants with plain water: soluble fertilizers should be held back for at least a week or two to allow root hairs to develop in their new environment.

Landscapers, who have renovated plantings of trees and shrubs in which they mechanically augured planting holes and employed the old paradigm of "improve the soil with better quality soil and compost" have told me of encountering situations, in clay soils, where roots grown in "improved holes" had never grown out of the original planting hole. They've also come across taller trees (often conifers) which have been tipped out of their holes by high winds after 25 years of living in "improved planting holes": their roots had never left their planting hole to firmly anchor the tree.

To help overcome the poor drainage of the clay soils on our property, we've created sloped-sided raised beds (originally about 8 inches high) for many of our perennial beds. This provides an opportunity to create a better quality soil (nutrient and drainage-wise) for the plants and the plants' crowns are raised above possible water-logged conditions (especially important for delphiniums). We cyclically mulch our beds with materials that are

available: sometimes straw, other times wood chips, and at about three-year cycles add shrimp or horse manure compost to maintain soil fertility.

For some plants, such as peonies, that are very long-lived and develop huge root systems, we suggested putting bone meal powder in the bottom of the hole and covering it with a thin layer of soil before installing the plant in its hole. Bone meal (phosphorus rich) is not very soluble so it should be below the root system where roots can grow into it and absorb any phosphorus that has been solubilized by soil microorganisms.

### Epsom Salts: Thoughts stimulated by questions raised at March's monthly meeting.

A couple of audience members questioned Mark Dallas, our March meeting speaker, whether he had experience with applying epsom salts on roses. Mark responded that he had used them in the past but was not sure what results had ensued. This prompted me to refer to a website that I frequently refer to when something of a hand-me-down piece of advice on gardening practice comes up. I remember reading, in the past, that adding epsom salts to soils is seldom beneficial. Time to check back on my resource, I thought.

[\*Epsom Salts: miracle, myth ... or marketing\*](#) is a fact sheet on Linda Chalker-Scott's website. Linda is Urban Horticulturist and Associate Professor, Puyallup Research and Extension Center, Washington State University, Puyallup, Washington.

Linda writes that few soils (sandy or acidic might be) are deficient in magnesium. She explains that magnesium deficiencies may not be a deficiency, but an imbalance of magnesium with other soil minerals. Magnesium imbalances are usually seen in soils being intensively cropped. There is much more in her three-page article.

Linda's article reviews typical advice: "Roses: 1 tablespoon per foot of plant height per plant; apply every two weeks. Also scratch 1/2 cup into soil at base to encourage...new basal cane growth. Soak unplanted bushes in 1 cup of Epsom salts per gallon of water to help roots recover. Add a tablespoon of Epsom salts to each hole at planting time."

Linda advises that "there is no published, scientific research on Epsom salts effects upon roses. The origin of these recommendations is unclear." The science behind the use of Epsom salts is only applicable to intensive crop production in situations where magnesium is known to be deficient in the soil or in the plants. It is irresponsible to advise gardeners and other plant enthusiasts to apply Epsom salts, or any chemical, without regard to soil conditions, plant needs, and environmental health.

## ***Culinary Herbs for Short-season Gardeners***

by Dr. Ernest Small and Grace Deutsch

a book review

by Val Collins\*

*You say "a herb"; I say "an 'erb'."*

Ottawa Valley-born Dr. Small received his doctorate in plant evolution from the University of California in 1969 and has been employed with the Research Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Ottawa ever since. Grace Deutsch, a Australian transplanted to the Toronto area 30 years ago, grows herbs on the family's farm in Bruce County, Ontario. In this 180-page book, the combined work of Grace, the gardening pragmatist, and Ernest, the researcher/avid gardener, ends up being a concise, practical and very portable book easily carried to the garden as a handy reference *how-to*.

British author E. Nesbit, in 1911, used *an herb* in her book, *The Wonderful Garden*, probably indicating that she pronounced it without the h. To settle the arguments—both versions are correct. Now that's sorted, how many of you have been tormented by poetic descriptions of plants that have no hope of growing in our northern climate?

Ernest and Grace have written a practical, easy-to-use growing guide to 100 hardy herbs for us northerners. The first 27 pages of the book are filled with basic cultural, season-extending, and harvesting information. In the compendium part of the book, the authors include the herb's human history in myth, legend and tradition, as well as medicinal uses—information a herbalist likes to have. This book is close to an "all you ever wanted to know about but were afraid to ask" treatise. Want the balance of what's known about 400 herb species? See Dr. Small's 710-page tome *Culinary Herbs* published in 1997 by NRC Press for the last words on herbs.

Short-season gardeners—suffer no more. *Culinary Herbs for Short-season Gardeners* is a wonderful aid to developing your ability to grow herbs. Oh yes, ... many of the photographs in the book were provided by Gerry and Sharon Channer while they operated The Herb Garden near Almonte!

[Click here](#) for an extensive online portion of *Culinary Herbs for Short-season Gardeners*.

[Click here](#) for a 100-page preview of *Culinary Herbs*.

*"If you have a garden and a library you have everything you need." Cicero*

\* Val Collins, who runs a [community garden on her front lawn in Kanata South](#), has just joined West Carleton Garden Club. Welcome Val and thanks for you timely contribution to this newsletter.

## **"Clickables"**

[Growing potatoes in containers is kids' play!](#) Toronto Botanical Garden's Director of Horticulture, Paul Zammit, has posted a great "how to" for younger kids keen on developing a green thumb. Paul's 14 tips are concise and cover all the steps necessary to reward any kid's (young or old) container-wise potato-growing urge.

[Growing Vegetables Through the Seasons With Succession Planting](#): Learn how to grow your own food almost year-round with these simple instructions for garden design. This link takes you to a four-page *Mother Earth News Magazine* excerpt from the book *The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener* by Niki Jabbour. Niki gardens in the Halifax, N.S. area. where short summers and low levels of winter sunlight create the ultimate challenge for food gardeners

[A GM-Free World ... Leading Geneticist Exposes the Bad Science of Biotech](#) is a 2004 interview published in the magazine AcresUSA—North America's oldest, largest magazine covering commercial-scale organic and sustainable farming. AcresUSA, in publication for over 35 years, focuses on eco-agriculture (a.k.a. sustainable agriculture). This interview defines what genetic modification means and lays out the broad scientific concerns and health (human and environmental) implications of GM crops as they find their way onto our tables.

## **West Carleton Garden Club**

### **Monthly Meetings**

Monthly meetings of the West Carleton Garden Club begin at 7:30 pm the second Tuesday of the month (September to June) at the Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Road, Carp.

**Website:** <https://sites.google.com/site/westcarlontongardenclub/>

**Facebook:** Search: "West Carleton Garden Club"

### **Club Contacts (2012–2013)**

President - Donna Caldwell (839-2079)  
Vice President - David Hinks (461-2248)  
Treasurer - Pam Leeks (839-1928)  
Secretary - Denise Burnham (839-7316)  
Newsletter - Phil Reilly (832-2965) ([reilly@magma.ca](mailto:reilly@magma.ca))  
Program, Website & Facebook - Anne Gadbois (256-7161)  
Plant Sale - Mary Reynolds (832-0408)  
Hospitality - Mary and Roy Reynolds (832-0408)  
Flower Show - Nancy Argue (622-1122)  
Membership - Brenda Baird (839-3094) and Anne Crosley  
Yearbook - Lorraine Jeffrey (839-7355)  
Members at Large - Laurie Lord (839-6596)  
Past President - Anne Gadbois (256-7161)